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ABSTRACT

Because use of the backcountry makes a physical impact on the land and an impact on the experience on other backcountry visitors, these notes summarize some of the Northwest Outward Bound School's current operating practices which seek to minimize both types of impact. The first section outlines expected student behavior in encounters with other backcountry users. The next section emphasizes minimizing the physical impact on the backcountry by users. The section covers travel procedures, campsite selection, fire regulations, proper latrine construction and care, procedures for washing and for disposal of soapy water, and trash disposal. (CM)

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Introduction

One of the main instructional goals at Outward Bound is to educate students to minimize the impact made by use of the backcountry.

Impact from any backcountry visitor takes two forms:

1. the physical impact on the land
2. impact on the experience of other backcountry visitors.

These notes summarize some current operating practices which seek to minimize both types of impact.

Minimum Impact on Other Users of Backcountry

Most backcountry users expect to experience solitude during their visit. An encounter with an Outward Bound group containing 10–12 people traveling together is not necessarily an agreeable part of the other users' experience. Large parties seem to adversely impact other users' satisfaction more than small parties. Encounters on trails as opposed to encounters near campsites are preferred. Encounters near roadheads are expected and less of an adverse impact than encounters in remote parts of the backcountry (Reference 1).

The following policies and practices are used by Outward Bound:

- Plan routes to avoid heavily traveled trails and high use areas.
- Avoid having two groups traveling in close proximity. Travel and camp a mile or more apart.
- Use separate trails when dispersing from a roadhead, if possible. Have people spaced a few yards apart while hiking to avoid appearance of being a military group on maneuvers.
- Ensure group state of dress or cleanliness won't offend other users.

- Be courteous when meeting other users. Allow them room to pass on the trail. A warm greeting will improve the encounter.
- If the other user appears interested, explain the purpose of the Outward Bound group's visit.
- Avoid popular peak climbs on weekends.
- Move off summits if other users appear.
- Avoid excessive noise which may be heard many miles away.
- Give other users' campsites a wide clearance when traveling.
- Camp and take lunch stops out of sight of trails.
- Avoid camping at roadheads when picking up food and equipment resupplies. Minimize your time at the roadhead.
- Keep a tidy campsite. Leave no equipment, food or litter strewn about.
- If you do camp in proximity to other parties, give them as much privacy as possible. Use terrain features (e.g. knolls and vegetation) for screening.
- Wear swimsuit while swimming; nudity will offend many other users.

Minimum Physical Impact on Backcountry

Outward Bound's aim is to get each student to gain an understanding of the importance of wild areas as a spiritual retreat for man and of the fragility of these environments. We expect each student to develop a **personal commitment** to minimizing the physical impact of their visit to the backcountry. (See References 2 & 3).

Travel Procedures

- In the spring, travel across snow rather than tundra as much as possible. Soil and vegetation are easily damaged during the thaw.
- Use existing trails when available; do not cause erosion by cutting switchbacks.

- If a section of a trail is muddy, consider making a drainage improvement rather than bypassing the muddy section and creating a new trail.
- When crossing trailless meadows or tundra areas, consider fanning out rather than hiking in single file. A group of 10 in line can crush fragile plants and create channels for erosion.
- When bushwacking or traveling cross-country, leave no markers, cairns or blazes. Allow others the same pleasure in navigating trailless country that you received.
- Travel quietly in the backcountry: avoid clanging pots and cups hanging from packs. The noise will lessen the chances of seeing wildlife and will also disturb other users.
- Take no physical souvenirs from the backcountry; flowers, rocks, bones, etc. Leave these for others to enjoy also.
- Animals and birds should be observed from a distance. Respect their need for undisturbed territory.
- Dogs or other pets must not accompany groups. They may disturb wildlife and their noise may offend other users.
- Pick up litter you find along the trail. Keep one pocket of your pants just for trash.
- Consider clearing brush from an overgrown trail or repairing deteriorating tread. If extensive, note for a future service project.
- Remove blowdowns and rocks from trails if feasible. If extensive, note for a future service project.
- When passing horses on a trail, step off the trail and stand quietly until animals have passed. Horses do have the right of way.

Campsite Selection

- Use an existing campsite if available and it seems no other users will require it. This will concentrate the areas of unavoidable human impact.
- Avoid camping on edges of lakes, banks of streams and in meadows. The vegetation in these locations is more susceptible to destruction than forest duff.

- Avoid trenching around tarps to improve water drainage. Trenches are unsightly and not needed if campsite is properly selected.

Fires

- Use an existing fire circle if it exists.
- Make only small "squaw" fires which people can gather round rather than "white-man" fires.
- Use a stove for cooking all meals and keep fire as a luxury for evening discussions, for unusually wet and cold conditions or for teaching the art of firebuilding.
- Take only dead and fallen wood for fire making. Don't strip dead limbs off living trees, tear down snags, etc. These are an aesthetic part of the scenery.
- Avoid fires close to timberline or in areas of heavy use where wood supply is scarce.
- To build a fire in a new area:
    1. Choose a spot away from overhanging branches, tree roots and reflector rocks.
    2. Remove the upper layers of organic soil (containing roots, insects, etc.) and save the soil for covering up the fire scar. Use EXTREME CAUTION in areas of heavy duff accumulation as fires can smoulder for weeks, travel underground along roots and be fanned into a major forest fire by the wind. Make sure you reach mineral soil with the firepit and make the hole considerably larger than your intended fire.
    3. Ensure fire pit is cold to touch before leaving. This may require considerable drowning with water and digging out in a heavy duff area. Remove any foil accidentally placed in fire then either bury or disperse the ashes.
    4. Replace organic soil and sod. Scatter any fuel you have collected but not used so that area does not attract other campers.
    5. Rocks should NOT be used to ring fire. Turn any accidentally scarred rocks black side down or disperse.

6. Removal of firescars left by other parties should be done only at infrequently used campsites where a new firescar is unlikely to reappear. Clean foil out of ashes, disperse, and turn in top organic layer of soil and make disturbed area look as natural as possible.

Latrines

- For individual stops along the trail, a person can make a small hole, digging down into the humus layer.
- For overnight camps, locate the latrine away from water at least 300 feet from any stream or marshy area.
- Dig a trench large enough for the needs of the group and ensure each member of the group knows the location of the latrine.
- Toilet paper and sanitary napkins decompose more slowly than human wastes and should be burned either in the latrine or the fire. When possible use natural substitutes for toilet paper (e.g., sticks, cones, leaves or snow).
- Keep the shovel by the latrine and spread a layer of dirt after each use.
- Fill in latrine before leaving and cover with rock or log to prevent animals digging area up. Organic garbage (e.g. surplus oatmeal) may be buried in the latrine.

Washing

- Keep soap out of streams, ponds and lakes. Even "biodegradable" soap can pollute drinking water.
- Use a "biodegradable" soap for all washing as it breaks down faster than other types.
- Wash dishes, clothes and self away from water supply. Pour soapy water on soil well away from bank. Vegetated soil will filter the soapy water more slowly than sandy soil and allow more time for soap to break down.
- Keep use of soap to a minimum and do not dispose of soapy water at all in tundra areas.

Trash

- Carry out all non-burnable and non-organic trash.
- Burn only paper or cardboard trash. Carry out plastic.
- Be careful not to burn foil wrappers in the fire. The residue is very hard to pick out of the ashes.
- Dispose of food scraps and other organic trash in the latrine.
- Be careful not to get food scraps in streams or lakes where they will be very slow to break down.
- Just before leaving, make a careful check of camp area for trash.

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